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AUTHOR Galen, Nancy; Johns, Jerry L.
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ABSTRACT

Bibliotherapy may be of assistance in helping children cope with problems in the following ways: by helping them learn to analyze their attitudes and behavior; by assisting them in comparing their beliefs with those of others; by offering possible solutions to problems; and by contributing to their socialization. To identify the types of problems faced by primary school children, a study was undertaken in which 81 primary grade teachers selected the ten most prevalent problems faced by children from a list of 17 problems in three categories: self-concept, relationships with others and the need to cope with change. Results were used as a framework to compile an annotated booklist based on the following categories: coping with competition, divorce or other change in family status, failure, peer group pressure, and alienation and rejection; and recognizing and accepting one's strengths and weaknesses. The resulting booklist is intended to aid interested professionals in the selection of appropriate books for children in need of personal or social guidance. (DF)

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Children in Conflict: Books that Help

Nancy Galen

and

Jerry L. Johns

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CHILDREN IN CONFLICT: BOOKS THAT HELP

At some time in every classroom, teachers may notice children in conflict. Perhaps Anne cannot understand her parents' divorce. Perhaps William feels rejected by his peers. What can teachers do to help students deal with their problems? Bibliotherapy, or therapeutic reading, may be one answer to this question. The purpose of this article is to suggest some books which may help children understand themselves and their problems.

Bibliotherapy can be regarded as an interaction between a reader and a book which helps the reader solve problems and/or develop effectively. Advocates of bibliotherapy believe that people can be affected by what they read; thus, some books have the potential to change readers' habits and attitudes. This belief has classical origin; the library was called the healing place of the soul in ancient times.

Bibliotherapy is based on the notion that a reader may identify with a character who is having problems similar to his or her own. Because a story is not real life, some very sensitive issues can be confronted through literature without creating the anxiety they might in real life. Shepherd and Iles (1976) suggest that this characteristic makes reading

> ...ideal as a tool to help children explore or realize various means of solving personal problems; it is an abstract experience and it is reversible, you can decide that you do not want to follow the same course of action that the story character took and no one may even know that you entertained the idea, much less observe you try it out (p. 569).

This interpretation of bibliotherapy neither assumes the teacher to be a skilled therapist nor the child a psychological misfit in need of clinical treatment. Rather, it conveys the idea that teachers should be sensitive to the effects of reading upon children and should realize that literature can help children cope with their problems.

Many have suggested situations for which bibliotherapy can be effective (Newell, 1966; Witty, 1966; Spache, 1974; Shepherd and Iles, 1976). Through bibliotherapy, children may learn to analyze their attitudes and modes of behavior. Books may assist children in comparing their beliefs with those of others. Books may offer many possible solutions to problems or even present the solution that could lessen a child's inner turmoil.

In addition to these personal values, reading may contribute to a child's socialization. Reading may increase the ability to understand others by promoting empathy or encouraging social insights. Reading about a situation has the potential to sharpen perception and deepen understanding in children who are not themselves in similar situations, but whose friends or family may be.

Children, like adults, have problems. At times children need help learning to face problems, to see them in perspective, and to deal with them adequately. Books alone cannot solve these problems, but they can help. But how should such books be selected?

Determining Categories for the Booklist

Because of the multiplicity of developmental problems explored through children's literature, an attempt was made to select those problems which primary (K-3) teachers believe to be most prevalent among their students.

Several volumes about children's literature were examined to find some common developmental or emotional problems of primary age children (Witty, 1966; Arbuthnot and Sutherland, 1972; Reid, 1972; Spache, 1974). Seventeen of these problems were included in a questionnaire which was divided into three broad categories: concept of self, relationships with others, and the need to cope with change.

The questionnaire was distributed to a non-random sample of teachers from various parts of the country. Respondants were directed to select the ten problems they believed to be most prevalent among primary grade children. In all, 151 questionnaires were completed and returned. Of these responses, 81 were supplied by primary teachers who were under contract with school systems. The responses of these 81 teachers are summarized in Table 1. The following categories, chosen by at least eighty percent of the responding teachers, provide the framework for this booklist: coping with competition (93.8%); divorce or change in family status (93.8%); coping with failure (90.1%); coping with peer group pressure (88.9%); recognizing and accepting one's strengths and weaknesses (80.2%); and coping with alienation and rejection (80.2%).

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TABLE 1: Results of questionnaire (N=81) designed to pinpoint developmental/emotional problems prevalent among primary children

CATEGORY	Teachers Selecting Category	
	Number	Percent
CONCEPT OF SELF		
Coping with failure	73	90.1
Coping with feelings of shame	28	34.6
Coping with competition	76	93.8
Recognizing and accepting one's strengths and weaknesses	65	80.3
Problems of conflicting values	33	40.7
Coping with physical handicaps or differences	36	44.4
Accepting one's cultural background	11	13.6
Other (please specify)	9	11.1
RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS		
Coping with peer group pressure	72	88.9
Coping with alienation, rejection	65	80.2
Accepting others of different socioeconomic, cultural, or ethnic groups	22	27.2
Accepting the strengths and weaknesses of others	48	59.3
Resolving problems with siblings	59	72.8
Recognizing strengths and weaknesses in family members	19	23.5
Other (please specify)	12	14.8
NEED TO COPE WITH CHANGE		
Death	28	34.6
Divorce or change in family status	76	93.8
New baby	37	45.7
Moving to new neighborhood	39	48.2
Other (please specify)	3	3.7

Using the Booklist

Within each category, books are annotated alphabetically by author's last name. The following information is included within each annotation:

. author, title, publisher, publication date

. estimated interest level by age (INT). These are intended to be a rough guide. Children's reading skills, levels of social maturity, backgrounds, and interests are so varied that their tastes in books are almost unpredictable.

. Spache readability level (SP). This was determined by using the revised Spache Readability Formula. Readability scores for at least three selections from each book were averaged to yield a composite readability level. Spache (1974) warns users of the formula that its standard error of estimate is two or three months.

. plot summary. The problems and solutions presented in the book are delineated.

COPING WITH COMPETITION

Bonsall, Crosby. Mine's the Best. (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1973) INT: 3-8 SP: 1.4. An argument over whose beach toy is the best has two results: both beach toys break and the two boys become friends.

Bronin, Andrew. Gus and Buster Work Things Out. (N.Y.: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1975) INT: 3-10 SP: 2.2. What is Gus supposed to do with a dumb brother like Buster? And what is Buster supposed to do with a sly brother like Gus? Gus uses all his cunning to get the best of Buster, but his schemes always backfire.

Hoban, Russell. Best Friends for Frances. (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1969) INT: 5-10 SP: 2.5. Frances' friend Albert is too busy with the other boys to play with her, so Frances decides to be friends with her sister Gloria. The two girls plan an outing and finally allow Albert to come along. All the children learn that everyone can be friends -- boys and girls.

Pearson, Susan. Monnie Hates Lydia. (N.Y.: Dial Press, 1975) INT: 5-10 SP: 1.9. Monnie has planned a special birthday celebration for her sister Lydia, but Lydia ignores and belittles her. Even though Daddy warns her to be a "good sport," Monnie's anger gets the best of her and Lydia's birthday celebration ends with an unusual twist.

Viorst, Judith. I'll Fix Anthony. (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1969) INT: 3-8 SP: 2.9. A little boy feels resentment for his older brother Anthony, who is always threatening him and telling him that he stinks. The little boy retaliates by thinking of all the ways he'll "fix" Anthony when he's six.

Zolotow, Charlotte. The Unfriendly Book. (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1975) INT: 6-12 SP: 1.8. Judy has many friends and Bertha doesn't like it when Judy plays with the other kids. The two girls perceive other children in very different ways because Judy likes everyone and Bertha doesn't like anyone.

DIVORCE OR CHANGE IN FAMILY STATUS

Baldwin, Anne. Jenny's Revenge. (N.Y.: Four Winds Press, 1974) INT: 4-10 SP: 2.4. Jenny is very angry because her mother works and Mrs. Cramie stays with her. She tries to trick her mother into staying home and tries to make Mrs. Cramie quit the job. She finally becomes friends with Mrs. Cramie after she realizes that Mrs. Cramie wants to be her friend.

Clifton, Lucille. Some of the Days of Everett Anderson. (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970) INT: 4.8 SP: 3.0. Who is Everett Anderson? He's any child who ever missed his daddy, been afraid of the dark, or wondered about the stars. This charming story describes many childhood emotions without seeming condescending.

Lexau, Joan. Emily and the Klunky Baby and the Next-Door Dog. (N.Y.: Dial Press, 1972) INT: 4-10 SP: 2.0. Emily feels neglected because her mother is always busy doing the things her father used to do. She decides to run away, but her plan fails because she can't cross the street. Finally, she and her mother learn to understand each other.

Lexau, Joan. Me Day. (N.Y.: Dial Press, 1971) INT: 6-12 SP: 2.3. Rafer gets very excited about his birthday, only to be disappointed because his father has forgotten all about it. A surprise visitor makes Rafer's birthday special after all; the visitor also explains the family situation to him.

VanLeeuwen, Jean. Too Hot for Ice Cream. (N.Y.: Dial Press, 1974) INT: 6-12 SP: 2.5. Sara and Elizabeth are ready to go to the beach with Daddy, but his car breaks down so they go to the park instead. What begins as an "icky-sticky" day ends much better as the girls get to swim after all.

COPING WITH FAILURE

Baldwin, Anne. Jenny's Revenge. (see "Divorce or Change in Family Status").

Bonsall, Crosby. Mine's the Best. (see "Coping with Competition").

Coombs, Patricia. Lisa and the Grompet. (N.Y.: Lothrop, Lee, and Shepard, 1970) INT: 3-10 SP: 2.2. Because she's angry about being told what to do, Lisa runs away to a forest. There she meets a grompet who wants someone to tell him what to do. Lisa and the grompet become friends and Lisa finally sees the value of doing what she is told.

Simon, Norma. I Was So Mad! (Chicago: Albert Whitman, 1974) INT: 3-10 SP: 2.1. Text and illustrations relate situations which sometimes result in such reactions as frustration, anxiety, humiliation, and loss of control.

Viorst, Judith. Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. (N.Y.: Atheneum, 1976) INT: 5-12 SP: 3. All day long terrible, horrible, no good, very bad things happen to Alexander. He decides to move to Australia, but then remembers that his "mom says some days are like that -- even in Australia."

COPING WITH PEER GROUP PRESSURE

Hoban, Russell. Best Friends for Frances. (see "Coping with Competition").

Horvath, Betty. Not Enough Indians. (N.Y.: Franklin Watts, 1971) INT: 6-10 SP: 2.8. When the Maple Street Gang becomes the Maple Street Indians, Mary Edith is banned from the pow-wows. How she wages a battle for acceptance and how she ends up in complete (if unacknowledged) control makes a humorous story of a youthful feud.

Sharmat, Marjorie. I'm Not Oscar's Friend Anymore. (N.Y.: E. P. Dutton, 1975) INT: 6-12 SP: 2.4. Anyone who has ever had a friend turn into a former friend will enjoy reading about how Oscar's friend handles the situation.

RECOGNIZING AND ACCEPTING ONE'S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Alexander, Martha. I'll Protect You From the Jungle Beasts. (N.Y.: Dial Press, 1973) INT: 3-8 SP: 2. In his dream, a little boy and his teddy bear are walking through the forest. They develop a special and encharted way of protecting each other from the jungle beasts. The illustrations are especially clever: biggest in the picture is the one, boy or teddy, who's protecting the other one.

Conford, Ellen. Impossible Possum. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971) INT: 3-10 SP: 2.6. Randolph feels disappointed because he can't hang by his tail. He finally succeeds by using sap to make his tail sticky; but then winter comes and the sap dries up. Randolph's sister Geraldine tricks him and Randolph discovers that he can hang by his tail.

Conford, Ellen. Just the Thing for Geraldine. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974) INT: 3-10 SP: 2.5. Geraldine is a possum who likes juggling better than anything else. Her parents try to get her interested in other arts and crafts, but she's not happy until she learns to accept her weaknesses and build upon her strength.

Desbarats, Peter. Gabrielle and Selena. (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968) INT: 5-10 SP: 2.6. Two friends decide to exchange families. Their parents go along with the trade, but soon each girl decides that she likes her own home best.

Hill, Elizabeth. Evan's Corner. (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967) INT: 4-10 SP: 2.1. Evan is a small boy who lives in the city with his large family. He wants a place of his own and finds one corner of a room for that special spot. Even after filling his corner with different things, Evan is still dissatisfied. His mother helps him see that his corner will be more special if he leaves it occasionally to help someone else.

Merriam, Eve. Boys and Girls, Girls and Boys. (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972) INT: 4-10 SP: 2.7. This story is of eight children, four boys and four girls, who share interests, hopes, fears, etc. They show that children are boys and girls together.

COPING WITH ALIENATION, REJECTION

Alexander, Martha. And My Mean Old Mother Will Be Sorry, Blackboard Bear. (N.Y.: Dial Press, 1972) INT: 3-10 SP: 1.8. After Anthony gets in lots of trouble, he and his blackboard bear decide to run away. The independent life doesn't quite appeal to Anthony, though, and after his first night out he decides to return to "mostly a good mom."

Lionni, Leo. Little Blue and Little Yellow. (N.Y.: Astor-Honor, 1959) INT: 3-8 SP: 2.2. Rejection because of physical difference is explored in this book using "little blue" and "little yellow" -- two abstract figures -- as characters. When they blend to become green, their families reject them until they discover what has happened.

Sendak, Maurice. Where the Wild Things Are. (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1963) INT: 3-8 SP: 4. Max is a young boy who has been sent to bed for misbehaving. He imagines that he sails to where the wild things are. The creatures are bizarre, but Max is their king and they love him. Max realizes that he needs "someone who loves him best of all" so he sails home to find his supper on a table in his room.

Yashima, Taro. Youngest One. (N.Y.: Viking Press, 1962) INT: 3-8 SP: 2.6. Bobby tries many times to see who's living on the other side of the hedge, but he is always too shy. Finally he opens his eyes to see the smiling face of a new friend.

The categories included in this booklist are not an exhaustive inventory of problems encountered by primary children. However, this booklist can aid interested professionals in the selection of appropriate books for children in need of personal or social guidance. Classroom teachers can also use the annotations to locate stories which pertain to issues discussed in the

classroom. Whether chosen to help an individual child solve a personal problem or to help an entire class understand the lives of others, it is hoped that the books from this list will foster self-knowledge and sensitivity.

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